

CROSSLAKE

Maier promoted to interim sergeant after Swanson resigns

Casanova hired as full-time officer

By Nancy Vogt
Echo Journal

Open positions in the police department were filled during a special Crosslake City Council meeting Friday, Sept. 3, including naming Officer Jake Maier as interim sergeant.

The council first accepted the resignation of Police Sgt. Eric Swanson, whose last day of work was Sept. 2. In a letter, Swanson said his resignation was for personal reasons.

"I want to thank the

city of Crosslake for my employment throughout the years," he wrote. "I would also like to thank Chief Lee for the incredible job he has done for the police department and for the city."

Swanson said he'd like to stay with the city in a part-time position to help transition to a new sergeant. He served as sergeant since 2018 and was an officer in Crosslake since 1997.

After discussion, council members promoted Maier to interim sergeant as of Sept. 1 at \$32 per hour, and they hired part-time officer Adam Casanova as a full-time officer with a six-month probation start-

ing at \$24.35 per hour.

The council also hired Cody Haines as a part-time officer pending background investigation, physical and psychological evaluation. He's ridden along with officers several times over the past few years, said Police Chief Erik Lee, who attended the meeting online via Zoom.

"As of right now I am not working and there is no leadership in the department," Lee said as the council discussed making Maier the interim sergeant.

Lee said he'd be back to work the week of Sept. 6, likely on a light duty basis.

With the promotion

and hirings, the department has five full-time officers.

Council member Marcia Seibert-Volz asked if the city should advertise both the sergeant and full-time officer positions to possibly avoid paying \$10,000-\$20,000 in training costs by hiring officers who already had the training.

Lee said Casanova has had training with the Pequot Lakes Police Department, where he is also a part-time officer, and some of those cited costs are for items like a holster and uniform, which he already has. He's been a part-time officer with Crosslake since July.

No matter who is hired, they would need training with Crosslake

officers, Lee said.

City Administrator Mike Lyonais explained that for more than 30 years, Crosslake has built a pool of part-time officers with the idea of getting people who want to be with the department and progress their careers with Crosslake. Then when an officer leaves, there's a smooth transition to fill both sergeant and officer openings through available qualified candidates.

Firefighters going south

Crosslake may send firefighters to Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Ida after receiving a request for help from that state.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety

Homeland Security and Emergency Management division received two separate emergency requests from the state, Fire Chief Chip Lohmiller said in a memo to the council.

The council approved Lohmiller's requests to send one water tender truck with two firefighters for two weeks in response to one request, and no more than four firefighters for three weeks to staff existing stations and equipment for a second request.

Each request also calls for six added days for travel. Crosslake would be reimbursed for costs.

Nancy Vogt may be reached at 218-855-5877 or nancy.vogt@pineandlakes.com. Follow her on Facebook and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/@PEJ_Nancy.

First COVID-19, then a drought

Pine River-Backus Community Garden needs help recovering

By Travis Grimler
Echo Journal

The Pine River-Backus Community Garden needs helping hands or donations to help recover from two very rough years.

When COVID-19 first hit, one of the surprising places for it to hit hard was the community garden behind the Pine River-Backus School building. It seems that year the usual green thumbs were wary of gardening in enclosed spaces with others because of the health pandemic.

"A lot of people didn't want to congregate," said Simon Whitehead, Cass County's State Health Initiative Partnership educator. "We even had trouble getting meetings together to plan the garden."

Now, a year later, the community garden has had to refund garden rental fees in part because of the extreme drought, as well as loss of water because of the construction of the nearby football field's new bathrooms and concession stand.

"We have a drought," Whitehead said. "And then I think some time in the beginning of May the water got cut off because they were working on the football field." Particularly dedicated

MEETING DATES

► There will be a planning meeting at 3 p.m. Monday, Sept. 13, at the garden. Those interested in helping may contact Simon Whitehead at 218-547-6843 or the Pine River-Backus Community Education office at 218-838-1476.

► There will be a Garden Makeover Day from 4-7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 16, at the garden site.

individuals persevered by watering their plots a bucket at a time.

"I think a couple people decided to go out and bring their own water to the garden and stuff like that," Whitehead said. "But it's pretty bad right now. It's yellow with weeds everywhere."

Now, Whitehead hopes the garden can get back on track with a little help. Volunteers have already begun to gather to help re-envision the garden space and eventually to clean it up for winter. Two master gardeners are helping to make plans.

"We've got big plans for the garden," Whitehead said. "They want to do some things like an orchard, a mushroom area, a shady part and maybe a hidden garden for the kids."

Big plans are in the works, including soil amendment, a new weed proofing trick, installation of several hose connections for easier watering and a compost heap for constant reju-

venation of the garden soil.

However, the project is going to take more people than are currently available. Of course, they are also looking for people who might want to rent a plot when updates are complete.

"We're looking for people who have gardens and like to garden and anyone who would like to just help out," Whitehead said. "It just needs a lot of work right now and it can't just be two or three people. We'd like a crowd of people who can get the whole thing done in one or two nights."

Cass County has helped with funding in the past, granting funds for top soil and fence posts among other items, and Whitehead thinks there will be some funding available again. He also hopes to tap into more funding sources.

In other communities, he said, American Legions, VFWs and Lions clubs often provide ongoing financial help to community gardens.

"I know the Lions in the Remer garden gave \$3,000 and they give them \$500 a month to just support the garden," Whitehead said.

In addition to funding, the garden could use an abundance of cardboard for weed proofing.

Travis Grimler is a staff writer for the Pineandlakes Echo Journal weekly newspaper in Pequot Lakes/Pine River. He may be reached at 218-855-5853 or travis.grimler@pineandlakes.com.

LOCAL BRIEFS

Cold weather gear donations sought in Pequot Lakes

Community Action of Pequot Lakes, with the help of the Pequot Lakes Community Library as a collection point, has organized a hat, mitten, glove, children and adult coat collection for September and October.

All donations will be delivered to Eagle View Elementary School in early November.

Donations should be new or in very good condition.

The library, located at 3117 Rasmussen Road (half block north of the stop sign), is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays; and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays.

Open house set Sept. 21 for potential Pequot Lakes splash pad

The Pequot Lakes City Council seeks public feedback on the potential splash pad project. An open house will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 21, at the Cole Memorial Building to discuss the project.

Observance to be held in Walker for 9/11

The Spencer-Ross American Legion Post #134 of Walker will conduct a flag ceremony Saturday, Sept. 11, at the Veterans Podium on the north lawn of the Cass County Courthouse in Walker. The public is invited to attend.

► 9 a.m.: Spencer-Ross American Legion

Post #134 of Walker Honor Guard will post the colors.

► 9:01 a.m.: Legion Auxiliary Chaplain Nancy Wagner will share opening remarks and a prayer.

► 9:05 a.m.: Cass County Sheriff Honor Guard will post and unfold the flag. The Legion Honor Guard will fire three rounds and play taps. The Cass County Sheriff Honor Guard will refold the flag.

► 9:10 a.m.: Thirty seconds of siren will sound followed by 30 seconds of silence.

► 9:11 a.m.: Flag will be lowered to half staff by the Walker Area Joint Fire Department.

► 9:12 a.m.: Ceremonial cannon salute.

The flag will fly at half staff for the remainder of the day.

WAPOA anniversary meeting delves into loons, shrimp

The Whitefish Area Property Owners Association annual meeting in August included a business meeting, guest speakers and the 50th anniversary celebration picnic lunch. The meeting was offered in collaboration with the National Loon Center.

Those who attended were treated to cinnamon rolls and coffee for breakfast, and had the opportunity before the meeting to visit several water quality protection informational booths. At the meeting, WAPOA President Tony Coffey presented a summary of WAPOA's focus areas and achievements and the 2020 financial report.

Three directors were elected: Miranda Graceffa, education; Robb Reid, aquatic invasive species; and Scott Johnson, water quality.

Walter Piper, behavioral ecologist, professor at Chapman University and scientist on the National Loon Center board, presented facts about loon behavior and the declining loon population in Wisconsin. They are predicting a 6% decline annually in Wisconsin, which means they could lose 48% of its loons by 2031.

Some of the causes of the decreasing loon population in Wisconsin, such as climate change, loss of habitat, lead poisoning, decline in fisheries and other factors, could be affecting loons in Minnesota as well. These factors may also contribute to a higher rate of chick loss, loss of chick mass (at 5 weeks) and fewer chick broods.

Piper said that banding loons is a powerful tool that has enabled scientists to follow specific loons throughout their lifetime and learn how they choose their territory; that the males decide where to build the nest; and to dispel the myth that they mate for life (they do not). Loons frequently have three to five mates in their lifetime.

Piper said loons have two tasks: staying alive and reproducing. They live up to 30 years, but males typically have a shorter lifetime than females, perhaps in part because they have to endure "fight to the death challenges" from other males. If a male or female loon is "evicted" from a territory, the remaining male or female will accept the new mate.

Under a National Loon Center grant awarded to Chapman University, Piper is studying the loon population in the Brainerd lakes area, including on the Whitefish Chain. Piper's group has banded about 80 loons on the Whitefish Chain this summer, plus additional loons on other area lakes.

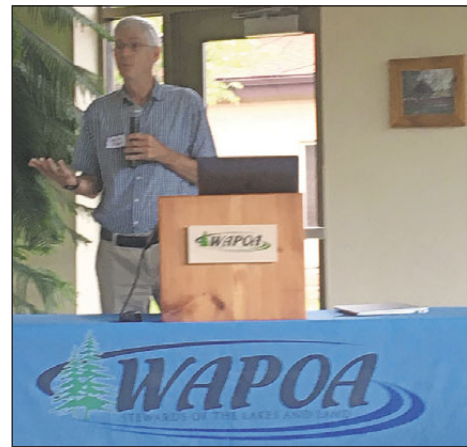
As in Wisconsin, they make weekly visits to the loons in their spring-fall territories, study them and learn their habits and record the data. WAPOA will follow Piper's research to learn how the local loon population is doing.

Lance Nacio, owner of Anna Marie Shrimp in Louisiana, presented facts and stories about "shrimping" and fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. His family has been fishing, trapping and farming for several generations. Nacio said that demand for shrimp went up by 70% during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has been hard to keep up with demand.

A 6,300 square mile "dead zone" in the Mississippi Delta poses many challenges. Poor water quality and clarity, decreased dissolved oxygen, toxic algae, and loss of breeding ponds due to flooding of brackish shrimp breeding ponds/habitat have significantly reduced the shrimp population.

And, fishermen must now go much further out into the Gulf to catch "clean" shrimp (not mixed with other species), which adds time and cost.

Nacio emphasized that development, agricultural and domestic run-



Contributed photos / WAPOA

Walter Piper spoke at the August 2021 Whitefish Area Property Owners Association's annual meeting about the plight of the loons in Wisconsin, which could possibly be happening in Minnesota as well.



Lance Nacio spoke at the August 2021 Whitefish Area Property Owners Association's annual meeting about the shrimp industry, which experienced a surge during the COVID-19 pandemic.

off, and the resulting phosphorus pollution of the Mississippi River, have significantly adversely impacted the delta. When asked what can be done to prevent further damage in the delta, Nacio said that managing soil health through use of cover crops, less fertilizer and no-till farming are being promoted throughout the ag industry.

No-till farming involves planting the seeds in holes poked into the ground - not covering them with furrows of soil that carry run-off to local waterways and move further on through the watershed.

He shared information about the book "Rancher, Farmer, Fisherman" by best-selling author Miriam Horn. In her book, she shares stories from a Montana rancher, a Kansas farmer, a Mississippi river man, a Louisiana shrimper and Gulf fisherman about what they are doing to protect lands and waters within the Mississippi River Watershed.

This book is available from several sources online. For more information, search "Rancher-Farmer-Fisherman."

Following the speaker presentations and question/answer sessions, meeting attendees were treated to a 50th anniversary celebration lunch while the video screen displayed lists of WAPOA business members, supporters and sponsors. Also displayed were the names of volunteers and area organizations that support WAPOA programs, which include AIS inspections, water quality sampling and testing, shoreland restoration, the boat show booth, the Run for the Walleye and communications.

Without these dedicated volunteers and organizations, WAPOA would not have been able to protect these lands and waters for the past 50 years. WAPOA appreciates their commitment going forward into the next 50 years.